Eat better, breathe easier: TEN ASTOUNDING NATURAL SUBSTANCES that improve respiratory function

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In a groundbreaking discovery, researchers at the University of Florida Health have uncovered a startling connection between diet and lung cancer, challenging long-held assumptions about the disease. Published on March 13, 2025, the study reveals how the typical Western diet—high in fat and fructose—can fuel the growth of lung tumors by increasing glycogen levels in the body. This finding not only reshapes our understanding of lung cancer but also opens new avenues for prevention and treatment.

The unexpected link between diet and lung cancer

Lung cancer has traditionally been associated with smoking and environmental toxins, but this study shifts the focus to an often-overlooked factor: diet. "Lung cancer has not traditionally been thought of as a dietary-related disease," said Ramon Sun, Ph.D., an associate professor and director of the UF Center for Advanced Spatial Biomolecule Research. "However, our research shows that what we eat can significantly impact lung cancer progression."

The study, funded by the National Institutes of Health and conducted in collaboration with the University of Kentucky's Markey Cancer Center, used a cutting-edge spatial metabolomics platform developed by Sun in 2020. This technology allowed researchers to visualize

molecular patterns in unprecedented detail, revealing how glycogen—a glucose storage molecule—acts as a key driver of tumor growth.

Glycogen, often referred to as the body's energy reserve, has been found to accumulate in high levels across various cancers. In lung adenocarcinoma, the most common form of lung cancer, glycogen acts as an "oncogenic metabolite," essentially feeding cancer cells and promoting tumor growth. Using lab models and computer simulations, the researchers demonstrated that mice fed a high-fat, high-fructose diet experienced increased glycogen levels, which in turn accelerated lung tumor growth. Conversely, when glycogen levels were reduced, tumor growth slowed. "Glycogen is an exceptionally good predictor of tumor growth and death in lung cancer patients," Sun explained.

This discovery builds on decades of research into Lafora disease, a rare neurological disorder characterized by abnormal glycogen accumulation. The study's findings suggest that targeting glycogen metabolism could offer new treatment options for lung cancer patients.

The implications of this research extend far beyond the laboratory. Just as anti-smoking campaigns have dramatically reduced lung cancer rates, the study's authors argue that public health initiatives promoting healthier diets could play a pivotal role in cancer prevention.

"In the long term, our approach to cancer prevention should mirror the success of the anti-smoking campaign—placing greater emphasis on public awareness and policy-driven strategies that promote healthier dietary choices as a fundamental component of disease prevention," Sun said.

Matthew Gentry, Ph.D., a professor and chair of biochemistry and molecular biology at the UF College of Medicine, echoed this sentiment. "Prioritizing a nutrient-rich diet, maintaining an active lifestyle, and minimizing alcohol intake are foundational strategies for long-term health," he said.

Ten natural substances that improve respiratory function

Here’s a list of ten functional herbal medicines and foods that have been studied for their potential to improve airway function and respiratory health.

1. Black Cumin Seed Oil (Nigella sativa)

Contains thymoquinone, which has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and bronchodilatory effects. It may help reduce asthma symptoms and improve lung function.

2. Serrapeptase

A proteolytic enzyme that reduces inflammation, breaks down mucus, and may improve airway clearance in conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

3. Mullein (Verbascum thapsus)

Traditionally used to soothe respiratory tract inflammation, reduce cough, and clear mucus. It has expectorant and anti-inflammatory properties.

4. Curcumin (Turmeric)

A potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compound that may reduce airway inflammation and improve lung function in asthma and other respiratory conditions.

5. Schisandra Berry (Schisandra chinensis)

An adaptogen that supports lung health by reducing oxidative stress and inflammation. It may improve respiratory endurance and reduce symptoms of chronic lung diseases.

6. Ginger (Zingiber officinale)

Contains gingerols and shogaols, which have anti-inflammatory and bronchodilatory effects. It may help reduce asthma symptoms and improve lung function.

7. Licorice Root (Glycyrrhiza glabra)

Acts as an expectorant and anti-inflammatory agent, helping to soothe the respiratory tract and reduce cough and mucus production.

8. Eucalyptus Oil

Contains cineole, which has mucolytic and anti-inflammatory properties. It is commonly used in steam inhalation to clear airways and improve breathing.

9. Garlic (Allium sativum)

Rich in allicin, which has antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. It may help reduce respiratory infections and improve lung health.

10. Green Tea (Camellia sinensis)

Contains catechins, which have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. It may protect against lung damage and improve respiratory function.

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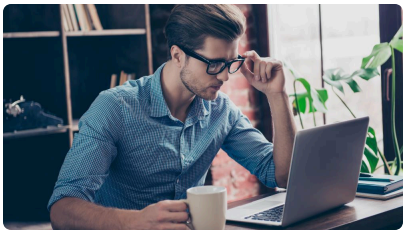

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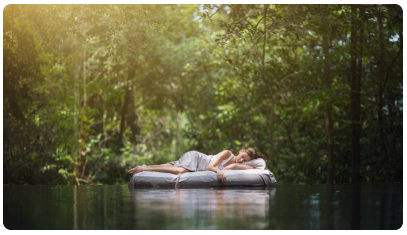

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